4.7 Visual and Aesthetic Resources

The visual environment encompasses elements from both the built and natural environments, including buildings, trees, bodies of water, and entire landscapes. This section examines potential impacts of the Center City Connector on visual quality and protected public views. Additionally, it assesses whether the project would induce additional light and glare in the study area. The study area is the views of and from the project; in this urbanized environment, the study area extends between the building façades on either side of the streetcar track and includes vistas at cross streets. This section first describes the methods for assessing visual quality, followed by an overview of the existing visual quality of the study area. Finally, it describes impacts and, as warranted, mitigation measures.

4.7.1 Assessing Impacts on Visual and Aesthetic Resources

The description of the existing visual conditions and the approach used to assess changes associated with the Center City Connector are based on the visual assessment system found in the Visual Impact Assessment for Highway Projects (FHWA, 1981). The detailed methodology used to assess changes to visual quality can be found in Appendix H7, Center City Connector Visual and Aesthetic Resources Technical Report (SDOT, 2015).

FHWA defines visual quality as a combination of the following three elements of a view:

- **Vividness** is the degree of drama, memorability, or distinctiveness of the landscape components. The degree of vividness is composed of landform, vegetation, water-features, and manmade elements.
- **Intactness** is a measure of the visual integrity of the natural and manmade landscape and its freedom from encroaching elements. This factor can be present in well-kept urban and rural landscapes as well as in natural settings. High intactness means that the landscape is free of eyesores and is not broken up by features that appear to be out of place.
- **Unity** is the degree of visual coherence and compositional harmony of the landscape, considered as a whole. High unity frequently attests to the careful design of individual components and their relationship in the landscape.

A visual quality assessment determines if the vividness, intactness, and unity of the environment would change with the development of the proposed project and whether the changes would be

Applicable Regulations

A visual assessment is included in NEPA environmental evaluations based on 42 U.S.C. 4321, Section 101(b)(2), which states that it is the “continuous responsibility” of the federal government to “use all practicable means” to “assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and esthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.”

SEPA (WAC 197-11 and WAC 468-12) requires all major actions sponsored, funded, permitted, or approved by state and/or local agencies to undergo planning to ensure environmental considerations such as impacts related to aesthetics and visual quality are given due weight in decision-making.

Seattle Municipal Code 25.05.675.P provides public view protection on views of significant natural and manmade features, which for this project include the Puget Sound, Elliott Bay, and Olympic Mountains.
perceived by sensitive viewers. The assessment also considers whether the proposed project would be consistent with the existing visual character of areas where the proposed project would be located. Per FHWA methodology, the primary portion of the study area was divided into landscape units—identifiable and distinct geographic areas within a linear project corridor from which there are views (the viewshed) of a proposed action.

A series of representative views, referred to as key observation points (KOPs), were selected within each landscape unit. The KOPs were used to represent areas along the LPA so that landscape character and visual quality could be described and changes associated with the LPA could be determined. Figure 4.7-1 shows the locations of the KOPs. Within each of the landscape units and at each KOP, photographs of the existing condition and a simulation of the LPA are provided to convey the degree of change.

### 4.7.2 Existing Conditions

There are four landscape units identified for the Center City Connector corridor:

- Landscape Unit 1 – Stewart Street and Olive Way
- Landscape Unit 2 – Pike Place Market
- Landscape Unit 3 – Commercial Core
- Landscape Unit 4 – Pioneer Square

Landscape units and their visual characteristics are described in Table 4.7-1 and illustrated on Figure 4.7-1. Photos of typical views in each landscape unit are shown on Figure 4.7-2.

Each landscape unit contains City of Seattle protected view corridors, as shown on Figure 4.7-3. In accordance with SMC 25.05.675.P, protected view corridors considered in this analysis include westward views of the Olympic Mountains, Puget Sound, Elliot Bay, and general views of the city skyline.

In addition, to the landscape units described above, the LPA would include other project components and options that would be seen. They are relatively small in size or scale or are located in areas not seen by many sensitive viewers. These are also described in Table 4.7-1 and include:

- The block along Republican Street between Westlake Avenue N and Terry Avenue N where the LPA would add a single track to connect with the existing South Lake Union street car tracks.
- The areas proposed for storage tracks required for expanding the existing South Lake Union OMF and/or Chinatown-International OMF
- Locations for one to two TPSS placed along the corridor in landscape units 1 through 4.
Figure 4.7-1 Landscape Units and Key Observation Points (KOPs)
### Table 4.7-1  Center City Connector Landscape Units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Landscape Unit #</th>
<th>General Name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Existing visual characteristics</th>
<th>Visual Quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Stewart Street and Olive Way</td>
<td>From existing Westlake Transportation Hub (Westlake Ave N and Stewart St) westward along Stewart St to First Ave. Also includes Olive Way between Third and Fourth Avenues.</td>
<td>Begins at the busy McGraw Square and the Westlake Transportation Hub with streetcar, Monorail, nearby light rail tunnel, and many bus routes. From the hub, west to First Ave, Stewart St is a busy thoroughfare lined with an assortment of uses that include a multistory parking garage, an at-grade parking lot, and multistory mixed-use buildings of varying heights and styles. Macy’s Art Deco building fills the block on Olive Way. Protected view corridors on Stewart St include Elliot Bay.</td>
<td>- Vividness: medium-high&lt;br&gt;- Unity: medium&lt;br&gt;- Intactness: medium&lt;br&gt;<strong>Visual Quality:</strong> medium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Pike Place Market</td>
<td>First Ave, from Stewart Street south past Pike Place Market to the north side of Union St.</td>
<td>It is a local and federal historic district with period architecture around Pike Place Market. Covered sidewalks with retail space on the street level and a mix of residential and commercial office on higher floors. Protected view corridors on Union St include Elliot Bay (see Figure 4.7-3).</td>
<td>- Vividness: high&lt;br&gt;- Unity: medium high&lt;br&gt;- Intactness: high&lt;br&gt;<strong>Visual Quality:</strong> high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Commercial Core</td>
<td>First Ave, from Union St south to Cherry St.</td>
<td>Lined with buildings of various ages, types, heights, and scales and contains a mix of uses such as offices, residences, hotels, and public institutions. Variety of distinctive buildings, from high rise to four- and six-story historic buildings progressing south along the corridor. Various cross streets include narrow views of Elliot Bay that would be greater once the Alaskan Way Viaduct is removed.</td>
<td>- Vividness: high&lt;br&gt;- Unity: medium&lt;br&gt;- Intactness: medium-high&lt;br&gt;<strong>Visual Quality:</strong> medium-high to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Pioneer Square</td>
<td>First Ave, from Cherry St south through Pioneer Square to S Jackson St, turns east on S Jackson St, and ends at the existing streetcar stop on S Jackson.</td>
<td>Local and federal historic district with three- to eight-story buildings, mostly brick. Tree-lined median creates canopy over street. Key features include Pioneer Square, wide sidewalks with retail at street level and mixed residential and office above. Yesler Way and S Jackson St are protected view corridors. Views from within this landscape unit do not allow views of protected features due to topography and tree canopy.</td>
<td>- Vividness: high&lt;br&gt;- Unity: medium&lt;br&gt;- Intactness: medium-high&lt;br&gt;<strong>Visual Quality:</strong> medium-high to high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscape Unit #</td>
<td>General Name</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Existing visual characteristics</td>
<td>Visual Quality</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
|                 | South Lake Union OMF and single track on Republican | Republican Street located at between Westlake and Terry Avenues; City owned parking lot facing Fairview Avenue N (between Thomas and Harrison Streets) | The single track would bridge existing track running along Terry and Westlake Avenues. The South Lake Union OMF would be located adjacent to the existing maintenance facility. These areas consist of modern, mid- to low-rise office buildings and commercial buildings. | Vividness: low
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Unity: medium to low                               |
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Intactness: medium to low                          |
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Visual Quality: low to medium                      |
|                 | Chinatown-International District OMF        | Existing OMF site located at Eighth Avenue S and S Dearborn Street       | The Chinatown-International District OMF (located at Eighth Avenue and S Dearborn Street) is in an industrial area flanked by the elevated lanes of I-5 to the east; elevated lanes and off-ramps of I-90 are approximately 0.5 mile to the south. There are some neighborhood and cultural centers across S Dearborn Street, but they do not face the busy roadway. | Vividness: low
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Unity: low                                         |
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Intactness: low                                    |
|                 |                                             |                                                                          |                                                                                                  | Visual Quality: low                                |
Figure 4.7-2 Typical Visual Character Photos for Each Landscape Unit

Landscape Unit 1: Stewart Street
Landscape Unit 1: McGraw Square at Stewart Street and Westlake Avenue
Landscape Unit 2: Pike Place Market
Landscape Unit 3: First Avenue, Commercial Core
Landscape Unit 3: First Avenue and University Street, Commercial Core
Landscape Unit 4: Pioneer Square
Figure 4.7-3 Protected Views
4.7.3 Impacts

4.7.3.1 No Build Alternative

The No Build Alternative would not result in any change to the landscape units. The visual environment would remain essentially the same and gradually improve as development occurs over time to individual properties and the city continues to implement enhancement design concepts. One such design concept expected to be implemented along the corridor is the Pike-Pine Renaissance, which will provide and incorporate more consistent and scenic pedestrian spaces through upgrades to intersections and sidewalks, including streetscape improvements, public area amenities, and light installations.

4.7.3.2 Locally Preferred Alternatives

Operational Impacts

Project components of the Center City Connector that could affect visual quality include the vehicles, trackway, stations, OCS, and TPSSs. The tallest component associated with operating the project is the OCS, which would include suspended wires and suspension poles that are approximately 27 feet high and typically installed at intervals of 80 to 100 feet. Poles along the alignment would be consolidated when possible by combining light standards or poles used for other purposes with the OCS suspension poles. Streetcar tracks result in a change to the views of the roadway, but they are visually consistent with the transportation purpose of the roadway and therefore are not mentioned further in the landscape units.

In addition, the City of Seattle has developed context-sensitive design considerations that would be incorporated into final design. As recorded in the Center City Connector Urban Design Analysis – Urban Context and Historical Setting (SDOT, 2015), these considerations were developed based on feedback from the Seattle Design Commission, Pioneer Square Preservation Board, and the Pike Place Market Historical Commission, as well as from feedback received during a public open house. Many of the considerations and design concepts that would be used for the final design are described below and illustrated in Seattle Streetcar Center City Connector; Transitway and Station Concepts, Precedents, Tools and Vision for First Avenue (SDOT, 2015). These tools and visioning concepts emphasize “quiet insertion,” a term that means the streetcar would blend into the context of the area as it travels through several commercial districts, as opposed to becoming a dominant feature. The design concepts for the stations include selecting appropriate trackway and platform paving materials, texture, and colors, identifying streetscape furniture and fixtures that reflect architectural styles, and designing the station canopy to be simple and transparent.
Landscape Unit 1 (Stewart Street and Olive Way)

The LPA would merge with the existing South Lake Union Streetcar adjacent to the Westlake transportation hub and McGraw Square, just before turning onto Stewart Street, and would be consistent with the urban character of adjacent areas.

The City of Seattle has identified Stewart Street as a protected public view of Elliot Bay, but the trackway, Third/Fourth Avenue Station platforms, and streetcar vehicles associated with the project would not block this view because the station would not extend into the intersection and the streetcars would pass just like any bus or other transportation vehicle does along the road.

The LPA would travel mostly in an exclusive trackway, with some areas of mixed traffic. The eastbound station between Third and Fourth Avenues would be located on the sidewalk of Olive Way and would not distract from the Macy’s building located adjacent to it, as shown in the visual simulation (see Figure 4.7-5). The westbound station would be located adjacent to what is currently a planter that separates Olive and Stewart Street. The planter would remain and have more visual prominence with the station adjacent to it. Viewers in this landscape unit include shoppers, nearby workers, pedestrians, motorists, and people walking to Westlake Center or McGraw Square. These viewer types do not have high viewer sensitivity. The LPA would not lower the existing medium visual quality of Stewart Street or the moderately high visual quality of Westlake Avenue and Olive Way. KOPs 1 and 2, shown on Figures 4.7-4 and 4.7-5, represent views within this landscape unit.
Figure 4.7-4 KOP 1 – McGraw Square as Seen From Stewart Street and Fifth Avenue, Looking East

Existing View

View with LPA
Figure 4.7-5 KOP 2 – Stewart Street and Olive Way Between Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue, Looking East (Downhill)

Existing View

View with LPA
Landscape Unit 2 (Pike Place Market)

The historic character and pedestrian scale in Landscape Unit 2 would be reinforced by implementing context-sensitive design features for the Pike Street Station platform and using paving materials for the platform and areas between tracks that would reflect the historic character of the intersection of First Avenue and Pike Street. See Figures 4.7-6 and 4.7-7 to see the existing condition and visual simulation of the LPA at this location.

The removal of parking along First Avenue and one lane dedicated to transit would remove the number of vehicles visible which would unclutter the view and enhance the aesthetic experience of pedestrians, including visually sensitive residents, some of whom would also see the change from their residences above First Avenue.

The LPA would pass by two areas along the corridor with concentrations of viewers: (1) the main entry to Pike Place Market near the intersection of Pike Street and First Avenue and (2) the Union Street overlook. The trackway passing through the brick-paved intersection of First Avenue and Pike Street would introduce a new element to this distinctive area. The tracks would also be visible in the roadway from the Union Street and Pine Street view corridors but would not contrast with the transportation function of First Avenue. Project components, such as tracks, station platforms, streetcar vehicles, and the OCS (on the eastbound or northbound side of the route; the west side would be wireless) along this section of First Avenue would not lower the moderately high to high visual quality of areas adjacent to the alignment. KOPs 3 and 4, shown in Figures 4.7-6 and 4.7-7, represent views within Landscape Unit 2.
Figure 4.7-6 KOP 3 – Pike Street and First Avenue, Looking North (Uphill)

Existing View

View with LPA
Figure 4.7-7 KOP 4 – Pike Street, Looking West toward First Avenue

Existing View

View with LPA, shown with planned bike facility
**Landscape Unit 3 (Core Commercial)**

The LPA tracks, OCS (located only on the northbound side of the alignment), and Madison Street Station platform in the middle of First Avenue would be consistent with the urban character of this landscape unit. KOPs 5 and 6, shown in Figures 4.7-8 and 4.7-9, represent views within Landscape Unit 3.

Eliminating parking along First Avenue would enhance the aesthetic setting of First Avenue and would be appreciated by pedestrians and visually sensitive residents who live in towers along the west side of First Avenue.

The track and streetcar vehicles would be consistent with the urban character of the Seattle Art Museum and of University Street, which includes a grand stairway between First and Second Avenues (adjacent to the Seattle Art Museum) as well as a series of stairs and plazas known as the “Harbor Steps” that connect First Avenue with the waterfront. The LPA would not lower the moderately high to high visual quality of this portion of First Avenue.
Figure 4.7-8 KOP 5 – Looking North (Uphill) along First Avenue from the Southwest Corner of First Avenue and Madison Street

Existing View

View with LPA
Figure 4.7-9 KOP 6 – Looking North (Uphill) along First Avenue from the Southeast Corner of First Avenue and Marion Street
Landscape Unit 4 (Pioneer Square)

The primary impact associated with the LPA in this landscape unit would be the addition of the Pioneer Square station with a median platform north of Cherry Street on First Avenue.

The Pioneer Square Station would be a center platform serving both north and south streetcar directions. This station sits at the border of Landscape Units 3 and 4 but is discussed as part of Landscape Unit 4. This would remove the left-hand turn pockets on First Avenue S. In this location, when proceeding north, the streetcar would reconnect to the OCS wire because the area within Pioneer Square (from Cherry Street to S Jackson Street) would be wireless. It would not lower the medium-high visual quality in this portion in Landscape Unit 4 because it would be compatible with the surrounding roadway and pedestrian elements present. SDOT is coordinating with the Pioneer Square Historic Preservation Boards on context-sensitive design components and materials such as paving, lighting standards, and station elements to integrate the Center City Connector with the historic character of this landscape unit. KOP 7, shown in Figure 4.7-10, represents the view in Landscape Unit 4 and Pioneer Square Station.
Figure 4.7-10 KOP 7 – Looking Northwest Along Portion of First Avenue S Between Cherry Street Columbia Street

Existing View

View with LPA
Other Areas Not in Landscape Units

Outside of the four landscape units, the LPA would add new elements in areas that overlap the existing South Lake Union and First Hill streetcar lines, such as the turnback and access track on Republican Street, the area proposed for expanding the existing OMFs, the Eighth Avenue S station design option, and the locations of the TPSS facilities.

**Turnback and Access Track.** Changes associated with the new single-access/turnback track for one block on Republican Street between Westlake and Terry Avenues would remove parking on the north side of the street and would have little to no influence on visual character or visual quality of this basically utilitarian street.

**OMFs.** The South Lake Union OMF expansion site would be seen by nearby residents. The expansion would consist primarily of additional storage tracks (which would be up to several feet lower in elevation than the adjacent Fairview Avenue sidewalk) and a one-story annex building that would replace a two-story office building at the corner of Harrison Street and Fairview Avenue (see OMF site plan in Chapter 3, Figure 3-11). The annex building would be smaller in scale than the existing building, and would be similar to nearby existing South Lake Union OMF buildings in terms of siding and roofing materials. Fencing along Fairview Avenue and Harrison Street would be selected to be compatible with the character of the neighborhood. The expansion would replace the existing city-owned surface parking lot west of the existing OMF. The enclosure of the additional yard would be consistent in terms of visual character. It would not change the average visual quality of the area near it (see Figure 4.7-11).

The proposed Chinatown-International District OMF expansion site would include the addition of four storage tracks within the existing parking lot of the City of Seattle Charles Street Maintenance Yard, which lies adjacent to the OMF. Consolidating the OMF at this location would only result in altering the uses of existing buildings and tracks inside the same yard. Both the OMF and maintenance yard lie within an industrial area, not visible by residents or office workers. The changes would occur within the existing enclosed maintenance site; therefore, it would not change the medium to low visual quality of the area. Lighting for either OMF would meet Seattle Building Code for shielded light.

**TPSS.** If a parking garage is selected for the TPPS site, the TPSS enclosure would have the appearance of a room, as shown on Figure 3-9 in Chapter 3, Alternatives. The other possibilities for the TPPS locations (underneath Seneca Street near Post Alley and a triangular traffic divider bounded by Westlake Avenue, Stewart Street, and Sixth Avenue) would require aboveground structures (as shown on Figure 3-8 in Chapter 3.). The location under Seneca Street would be difficult to see except from adjacent areas and would not change the utilitarian character of the area or lower the visual quality. An aboveground TPSS located in Westlake Square (a traffic island) would be more visible and would include architectural enhancements to match the
character and average visual quality of the surrounding area. No change to visual quality would result to views from and of the proposed TPSS locations.

**Seattle Protected Views**

Within one block of the LPA, people would view streetcar vehicles, the OCS, and tracks from the view corridors identified on Figure 4.7-3. Where the LPA would travel along First Avenue, the OCS would be located above the northbound trackway, but the southbound track would be wireless. The northbound trackway OCS would be placed among existing OCS used by electric trolley buses and would not appreciably add to the appearance of wires passing through and along the view corridors. Although streetcar vehicles would temporarily intrude upon views along protected corridors, there would be less overall traffic crossing than there is today. The streetcar lanes would be exclusive transit, limiting other traffic to one lane in either direction. Neither the OCS nor the streetcar vehicles would block views along the protected view corridors, but streetcar vehicles would be briefly seen as they passed in front of view corridors. Figure 4.7-7 depicts the existing view along Pike Street towards the Pike Place Market and a simulation of the view with the LPA. Although Pike Street is not a protected view, the simulation provides an example of how streetcar vehicles would briefly enter a protected view corridor just as a bus or large truck would.

**Light and Glare Impacts**

Lights from the streetcar vehicles would be seen at night and would be similar in appearance to buses that currently travel most of the streets the LPA would use. Station areas would be lit by existing streetlights. During final design, existing streetlight poles may be consolidated with OCS poles, but the total lighting conditions would not increase. Lights associated with the OMFs would be directed down, and directional shields would be used to minimize light and glare seen from nearby areas. The LPA would not result in noticeable light and glare impacts.

**Construction Impacts**

The primary construction impacts on aesthetic and visual resources would be temporary and related to closing portions of streets, staging equipment and materials, utility relocation, and trackway installation. Fencing would be required around some work sites, which would have a temporary negative visual impact. Mechanized equipment, lights for evening work, material storage and delivery, and removal of excavated material would be seen by viewers near the construction area to varying degrees. In locations adjacent to residences, there would be a greater likelihood that residential viewers would find construction activities aesthetically and visually disruptive. These impacts would be temporary and short-term and therefore would not result in a substantial impact.

**4.7.4 Mitigation Measures**

No adverse effects during operation have been identified; therefore, no mitigation is proposed. Temporary visual impacts during construction will be mitigated by screening construction zones and stage areas. Nighttime lighting will be directed downward to reduce the impacts of light on adjacent residences.